

T H E L O U N G E R.

[N^o XCV.]

Saturday, Nov. 25. 1786.

Here HUNT may box, or MAHOMET may dance. JOHNSON.

N^o XCV.

WHEN I returned from my morning's walk one day of last week, Peter informed me that a young gentleman had called, who would not tell his name, but promised to call again in the evening, and in the mean time left a letter, which he said would inform me who he was. "I think, Sir," said Peter, while I was opening the letter, "that were he a little older, and had a major wig instead of his own brown hair in round curls on his neck, that one might discover a likeness between him and Colonel Caustic." There was some reason for the resemblance; for in fact it was a young relation of the Colonel's, who had been two or three years at an English university, and is now come hither for the winter to study some particular branches at ours. He brought me a letter of introduction from my worthy friend his kinsman, which gave him, in the Colonel's delicate way, a great deal of commendation, though I am persuaded, from what I have seen of him, no more than he merits. "He is really a fine boy," said the Colonel's letter, "and I think you will like him the better that he pretends to be no more. He has neither learned to be a Fop nor a Prig at college; and though a little flighty and light-headed now and then, has a soundness at heart that never deceives one. The lad has a classical taste, and has written some love-verses that would not have disgraced better times, when the women were worthy of them."

When he came in the evening, I found his appearance very prepossessing, and not the less so, that I really imagined I saw some of that resemblance which Peter's sagacity had discovered. Peter laid two covers without my bidding; and the young gentleman accepted the invitation they implied. After our little supper, we got so well acquainted, and felt ourselves so much related through the connection of Colonel Caustic, that the young man, as I wished, forgot the difference of our age and the lateness of his introduction, and we quoted Horace, told college anecdotes, repeated college verses, and laughed at college puns, till midnight.

He pleased me much with the affection he expressed for my old friend and his sister, with whom he had spent several weeks previous to his coming hither. "You never saw the Colonel, Sir," said he, "in better health or spirits. He put one or two of his old guns in order on my account, and walked out with me himself, to shew me the grounds where the game was to be found, which he says was almost as plenty this season, as it was when he was a shooter."—"Why does he not come to town?" said I.—"I asked him that question, Sir; but he told me he did not intend to be in town; and yet I believe he was much the better for his last excursion hither."—"I am persuaded the journey would be of service to him."—His young relation smiled. "I believe it was not so much the journey to Edinburgh, as the follies he saw there, that did him so much good. He swallowed a thousand impertinences, he says, when here; and his sister tells me he has chewed the cud on them ever since. Every time he related any of them to her or to me, he seemed to be better pleased with himself, and with the times which he calls his own; though I am happy to believe that he will live these dozen years, to tell us that he has nothing to do with the present times. He says, he does not intend being in town again, because the novelty that amused him the last time he was there is over. I should only find, said he, the same follies and the same vices; the same coarse or frivolous men, and the same vulgar or giddy women, I saw these two winters ago."

“ But you may assure him, said I, he is mistaken; that I have received undoubted intelligence, that there is to be no folly, no vice, among us this winter; that our private society is to be decent and well-bred, our public places orderly and well regulated; that there will be no bludgeon'd beaux to jostle him in his walks, nor female cavaliers to stare him out of countenance; that our dinners are to afford the elegant entertainment of Attic conviviality, “ the feast of reason, and the flow of soul;” that the tea-tables of the ladies are to be schools of delicacy, refinement, and instructive conversation; that Lady Rumpus has learned silence, old —, sobriety, and his son, decorum; that our assemblies, instead of *fine ladies* lolloping through country-dances with *fine men*, are to be filled with *fine women*, who are to dance minuets with *fine gentlemen*; that at our concerts people of fashion are to listen to the music, and that the music is to be worth the listening to; that our Theatre——But you shall hear what it is to be from better authority. I received this very morning a letter on that subject, which, among other novelties, you may communicate to the Colonel. Here it is, sealed with a *Shake-spear's* head, and dated from *Holyroodhouse*.”

To the AUTHOR of the LOUNGER.

S I R,

I Presume, from the uniform practice of your predecessors, and indeed from several of your earlier Papers, that the state of the Theatre is by no means a subject of indifference to you. In this belief, I make bold to trouble you with a Letter concerning our Scottish Stage, which I hope will meet with your attention. I think, Sir, I may presume to say, that I am not an unqualified correspondent on that subject, having passed most of my life behind the Scenes, in different parts of the kingdom, and have reason to flatter myself with having been of considerable use to the Stage, though my labours have not proved so advantageous to myself as I had reason to look for. I was the first who brought any thing like discipline among *Bayes's Light Horse*; I had a very principal hand in the Sea in *Harlequin's Invasion*; and gave the Plan for the construction of the famous Cloud which took up the deities in *Midas*. These, and many other services of equal importance, have been long forgotten. I will make no personal reflections, Sir; but Managers are well known not to be always so attentive to merit as they ought to be. I know it has been said, that I was dismissed from the London Theatre, on account of an unfortunate accident, to wit, the falling of a flying dragon, which I had invented for a new Pantomime; by which the Devil and Dr Faustus were both killed on the spot. But, in the first place, the story is false in itself, the Doctor having only broke his nose, and the Devil his tail by the accident; and at any rate, the dragon was not of my construction, but one borrowed from the Opera-house, which had been fundered by hard riding in the ballet of *Jafon and Medea*.

I understand, Sir, that it is intended this winter to make a very material improvement on the Theatre at Edinburgh, by bringing down the *Sadler's-Wells* Company, to perform here during a considerable part of the season. I will not have the vanity to say, that this was entirely owing to a suggestion of mine; yet it is certain that I hinted at such an improvement several months ago, at the house of a Gentleman, an old acquaintance, with whom I sometimes take a Sunday's dinner, who is on very intimate terms with the Gentleman who dresses the Manager. But whoever may claim the honour of the invention, Sir, I cannot help congratulating this country on the event, which I look on as proceeding from the same liberal and enlarged spirit that has given rise to the Commercial Treaty with France. Undoubtedly a free and full communication and interchange of commodities is of advantage both among Nations and Theatres; and the jealousies and rivalships that used to subsist between contending Houses was extremely hurtful to all parties. It is the duty of every

every good citizen to promote an object so desirable as that of a friendly intercourse and mutual co-operation between such societies, for the entertainment of the public. With such good intentions, I beg leave to lay before you the sketch of a Plan for the more close and intimate union of the theatrical and dancing or tumbling kingdoms, by their not only occupying the same ground, and alternately exhibiting on the same stage, but by their mutual coalescing and incorporating with one another, so as to give a Play all the decoration and movement of a Dance or a Tumbling, and a Dance or a Tumbling all the interest and business of a Play. What an excellent entertainment, for instance, would Macbeth or Hamlet afford, if the plan of the Drama were preserved, according to the ancient theatrical mode, and the unfolding and progress of it brought forth according to the new or Sadler's Wells school. The Soliloquies might be turned into Hornpipes, the Battles into Country Bumpkins, and the respective Courts of Scotland and Denmark might exhibit themselves to great advantage in a Cotillon; or the solemn scenes might be performed on the Slack Wire, the more animated from the Tight Rope, and the bustle of a full Stage would naturally fall into Feats of Agility and Lofty Tumbling. In *Macbeth*, the *Little Devil* would be quite in his element. In the tragedy of *Venice Preserv'd*, what a brilliant High Dance might *Pierre* in the senate-house perform in his chains, (which is indeed but one step beyond his ordinary style of acting in that scene); and the senators (such of them at least whose robes would bear looking at behind) might join the inferior conspirators as *Figurantes*.

Comedy will easily and naturally slide into the department of her sister-arts; and as she has already betaken herself almost entirely to singing on the English Stage, she may with great propriety become a dancer on the Scotch Theatre. As to *Farces* or *petites Pieces*, I think they may admit of a different set of performers, and be played with applause by actors of the animal creation. *General Jackoo*, of the Sadler's Wells company, who I'm told has a very quick study, might soon be made perfect in *Fribble*; and the wonderful *English Bull-dog* be brought out in the part of *Major Sturgeon*. It could not but afford pleasure to every rational and philosophic mind, thus to see the lower orders of creation brought forward a step in the scale of being, and assuming, on the Stage of Edinburgh, a rank and consequence which partial nature has denied them.

But though the superstructure of dancing and tumbling is thus proposed to be raised on the old theatrical foundation; yet, Sir, it is by no means any part of my plan to discard or render unnecessary the present incumbents of the Theatre. Their exertions will necessarily be united with their new associates from Saddler's Wells, to get up, as it is called, the pieces which are to be performed in this new manner; and I have too much knowledge of the extent and versatility of their genius, not to be convinced that they will easily accommodate themselves to the change. Some of the best Tragedians of our present company will readily acquire the walk of the Tight-rope; most of the Ladies, I am sure, will have no objection to put themselves under the tuition of the Devil, in the tumbling way; and several of the most celebrated comic performers are already so excellent in the *posture* line, as to give assurance of their arriving at the very first degree of eminence in that department.

And now, Sir, give me leave to state some of the obvious advantages that will arise from this new and improved mode of conducting the Drama.

1st, As the entertainment would be addressed to the eyes, it would allow perfect liberty to the tongues of the audience: of the restraint, in this particular, which arises from the present method of conducting the Drama, the most respectable part of the house have great reason to complain, as the players on the stage speak almost as loud as people of the first distinction in the side-boxes.

2^{do}, There would be none of that improper or unbecoming freedom
or

or double *entendre*, against which some of the more rigid moralists inveigh, in the dialogue of our late comic performances. If any of the Pantomime should happen not to be quite so pure as it ought, (a grievance which even the spoken plays are liable to in the hands of some actors), it will be easy for the Ladies to turn their eyes half aside, or to cover them with the sticks of their fans: putting one's fingers in one's ears is not so graceful an attitude.

3th, It will very much improve the catastrophe of some of our best English tragedies. *George Barnwell* may then be played, as I once heard a gentleman of this city propose to a Manager, with the hanging thrown into action instead of narrative, as the swing of several actors of the new company can easily be made to imitate that polite entertainment; and some of them who at present shew such dexterity in twisting their bodies into the collared-eel, and other beautiful forms, will have no difficulty of allowing themselves to be broke on the wheel in the part of *Pierre*, which being a novelty, and somewhat more natural and affecting than the mere preparatives at present exhibited, cannot fail of drawing great houses.

4th, It will evidently tend to facilitate the profession of an actor, and to widen the range from which excellence in that line is to be drawn. As things are at present, the British Stage, from the circumstance of language, is open only to the natives of England and Ireland; but if Plays are to be danced instead of spoken, their language, like that of Music, will be universal. This will remove a hardship peculiar to this part of his Majesty's dominions, which, from its provincial pronunciation, is almost entirely excluded from the Stage; but in a natural talent for dancing and feats of agility, is supposed rather to have the advantage of its sister-kingdoms. If the plan I propose is adopted, I shall not be surprised, if the district of *Strathspey* should produce a successor to *Garrick*, and a rival to *Mrs Siddons*.

Lastly, It will save a great deal of trouble to authors, who are often exceedingly at a loss how to carry on the dialogue of a piece through the space of five, or even of three acts. In the improved method I have taken the liberty to suggest, an author will not only, like some of our modern dramatists, have no occasion to write well, but he or she may actually compose a very good play, without having ever learned to write or read at all.

Many other advantages might be shewn to result from this proposed alteration of the mode of representing theatrical pieces; but I flatter myself, that even the imperfect announcement of the plan which I have given, will be sufficient to intitle it to the favour and patronage of persons of taste and knowledge; among whom, without flattery, Sir, I class the Author of the *Lounger* in a very distinguished rank.— I have the honour to be, &c. RICHARD BUSKIN.

I doubt not but it will afford pleasure to Mr Buskin to be told, that my young academical friend approved very much of his proposal. "In ancient Greece," said he, "though they did not carry this matter quite so far as your correspondent proposes; yet dancing made a chief part of the entertainment in dramatic representations. The verses indeed of *Sophocles* and *Euripides* were recited; but as we have no *Sophocleses* or *Euripideses* now, and scarce any actors who could speak their verses if we had, I believe Mr *Buskin's* plan to be a very expedient one. I remember one of our fellows at college, who liked excentric anecdotes, used to tell us of a company of Comedians he fell in with in a country-excursion, who having, by some little misfortune, lost their principal actor, gave out their next day's bill in these words: "On Monday will be presented the Tragedy of *Hamlet Prince of Denmark*; the part of *Hamlet*, for that night, to be left out."

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